



## **Having What It Takes – Hebrews 13**

### **Introduction: Read Hebrews 13:1-21**

In this last chapter, the Hebrews writer encourages his readers to holy Christian living in 6 areas and then essentially closes the book with what many writers describe as the most majestic benediction in all of Scripture in verses 20 and 21.

**These two verses summarize the entire message of Hebrews: that Christ is greater; that first of all He has dealt with our sins once for all at His death and resurrection (justification); and secondly, that He continues to work, both for us and in us, as our eternal High Priest, to equip us for good works and to actually transform us into people who please Him (sanctification)!**

If you're like me you probably get the forgiveness part, and Hebrews (along with Romans) makes it very clear – for those of us who trust in Christ, all of our sins – past, present, and future – have been taken care of by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But like me, you may also struggle to really understand the second part: that Christ can actually and truly enable us to please God and to look forward to hearing the words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” Matt 25 (KJV)

C.S. Lewis puts it this way:

*“The Christian is in a different position from other people who are trying to be good. They [non-Christians] hope, by being good, to please God if there is one; or . . . at least they hope to deserve approval from good men. But the Christian thinks any good he does comes from the Christ-life inside him. He does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us.”* From *Mere Christianity*.

*“The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses . . . shall find approval, shall please God. To please God . . . to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness . . . to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son – it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.”* From *The Weight of Glory*.

**Q: Is Lewis right in both quotes? Why or why not? Any other thoughts?**

**Q: Do you believe that you will or can please God – either now or in the future? Or is your hope based only on God's forgiveness of your sins (not that that's a small thing)? Do you ever wonder what the “minimum” might be for admission to heaven?**

**Q: Is the Church (universal), or Kingsway in particular, too focused on “getting saved,” and not enough on what the Bible teaches on what happens afterward?**

**Q: Consider ways in which God has changed you since you became a Christian. Is it significant? Do you believe these changes please the Lord?**

### **Study: Hebrews 13:20-21**

Let's examine the benediction briefly phrase by phrase (from the NLT and NIV):

- **“Now may the God of Peace”** – This title is used 6 other times in the NT, all by Paul (which is one reason why many scholars think he wrote Hebrews): Rom 15:33, 16:20; 2 Cor 13:11;

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Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Thess 3:16. This is not the wishy-washy “peace” that is merely an absence of conflict, but the real peace that exists between God and His people – those who have confessed Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and been baptized – who have had all their sins covered by His perfect, final, once-for-all-time sacrifice on their behalf. This is the peace of “justification” – we are now in a right relationship with God. Because of what Christ did, we have “peace with God” (Rom 5:1), “no condemnation” (Rom 8:1), and are invited to “come boldly to the throne of our gracious God” (Heb 4:16).

**Q: Has Hebrews convinced you that Jesus Christ has done all of the work necessary for your complete salvation? If not, what questions remain?**

- **“Who [that is, God] brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus”** – The death, burial, resurrection, and ascension (glorification) of our Lord are all part of God’s “redemption package.” They are all necessary. Dr. Johnny Pressley of Cincinnati Bible Seminary (the *alma mater* of many of our staff) says that “the resurrection served as a divine confirmation for the person and work of Christ – it proves that the cross ‘worked.’” Other Scripture confirms this. “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Rom 4:25). Read 1 Cor 15:12-58 sometime, 17 being a key verse, “And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins.”
- **“The great Shepherd of the sheep”** – When Jesus was on the earth, He called Himself the “good shepherd” (John 10) who “lays down His life for the sheep.” Sitting at the right hand of the Father, He is now the “great Shepherd,” *but still a shepherd for His people – us*. Isaiah prophesied of Jesus that “He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young” (40:11). Christ always cares for His flock – and will always do so. **Read 1 Peter 2:25 and 5:4.**

**Q: The NT uses the words “shepherd,” “bishop,” and “elder” interchangeably. Our shepherds/elders are “accountable to God” for our souls (Heb 13:17). Do you give them and the “Great Shepherd” joy in your Christian walk? Do you think you please them? Where would you fall on a scale of 1-10; 1 being mostly rebellious and 10 being saintly?**

- **“And ratified an eternal covenant with his blood”** – This eternal covenant is the New Covenant put into effect by the shed blood of Christ and His resurrection. It is in essence a contract between God and man in which God the Father accepts Christ’s one-time sacrifice for all the sins of all mankind. **Read Heb 9:12 and 10:19.** It is a key message of Hebrews. Our part? To believe (Heb 11), confess that belief (Rom 10:9-13), repent, and be baptized (Acts 2). Christ did all the heavy lifting!

**Q: Why do you think the gospel, the “good news,” that “whosoever” believes will be saved (John 3:16), is so hard for so many to accept? Is it “too good to be true?” Too hard? Too incredible? Too much “it will cramp my style?” What difficulties or hurdles did you face in coming to belief in Jesus Christ?**

- **“May he [the God of peace] equip you with all you need for doing his will”** – This phrase might remind you of the Lord’s Prayer, “your will be done.” Well, it starts with each one of us. Do we pray for the ability and knowledge and the “want to” to do God’s will. I know I don’t often do so. And if we don’t, is it because we are too self-absorbed or because we’re not sure about the “whole thing.” Lewis asks, “*Have we never risen from our knees in haste for fear God’s will should be too unmistakable if we prayed longer?*” So the author prays, as we should, that God would give us all we need to actually do His will: 1. The knowledge of it – mostly from His Word – the easiest part; 2. The desire to do it, the “want to” – harder; 3.

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The courage/conviction to actually obey and do what we know to be God's will for us – the hardest part. Christ sent the Holy Spirit to indwell each believer primarily to help us with our weak wills, not to give us more knowledge. Our problem is almost always the doing – not the knowing. Mark Twain has been quoted as saying, *"It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it's the parts that I do understand."*

**Q: Do you agree with Twain? When you struggle with God's will for your life, is it mostly because you don't know what it is, or more because you know it but don't really want to do it?**

**Q: As a creature, do you really believe that God's will for you is also what's best for you? I confess a disconnect here for myself, because I believe that "Father knows best," but I still rebel so often at following the clear teaching of Scripture. Does this same dilemma apply to you also? Dr. Phil isn't here, but why do you think this might be so? Why are we so often (in the words of Lewis again – sorry) *"fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us"*?**

- ***"May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him"*** – God made us all in His image. That image has been spoiled by sin, but He means to restore His people to perfection. As Christians, we have accepted God's plan for our redemption through the blood of Christ. Now He means to perfect us (sanctification) even though the process will not be completed in our earthly lives. Will we let Him work in us? If we will yield our stubborn wills to His we are promised that which Lewis finds so incredible – to in fact please God! Three points need to be made here:
  1. It is all done in His power: **Read Eph 3:16; Phil 1:6.**
  2. He is still our "Great Shepherd" and He wants us to find the joy of growing in Him. Hebrews 7:25 says that "He [Christ] is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." **Read also the great conclusion to Romans 8, especially verses 31-39.**
  3. The fact that this transformation is done through the power of Jesus Christ does not excuse us from making every effort to be a willing participant. So God's Word, the church, Christian friends, prayer, service, etc. all make us more "pliable" for God's work in us. **Philippians 2:12-13 sums up this "partnership" best: "Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him."**

**Q: Does the Philippians passage above seem contradictory to you? Why or why not? How would you explain this apparent paradox to a new believer or a questioner – that salvation is "by grace through faith" (Eph 2:8) but that we are commanded then to "work hard" at it?**

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- **“All glory to him forever and ever! Amen!”** – No comment needed!

**Q: Do you really want to please God, “to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness”? Do you really believe that our greatest possible joy can only be found in the absolute center of God’s will?**

The Apostle Paul could answer yes to both questions without hesitation. Consider these words to the church at Philippi written from a Roman prison.

*<sup>7</sup>“I once thought these things [being a Pharisee and a “good” Jew] were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. <sup>8</sup> Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God’s way of making us right with himself depends on faith. <sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, <sup>11</sup> so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!*

*<sup>12</sup> I don’t mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. <sup>13</sup> No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.” Phil 3:7-14*

### **Practice**

Pray that God would strengthen you in the three areas needed to do His will:

1. Knowledge: We have to know His Word.
2. Desire: That we would actually want His will above our own.
3. Courage/Conviction/Action: That we would obey what we know to be His will.

**Q: What other actions can you take today knowing that God wants to “equip you with all you need” to do His will and wants to “produce in you . . . every good thing that is pleasing to Him?”**

**Q: What action(s) will you take? God, through Jesus Christ, has all the power that you need.**